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One of Denmark's most prolific designers, Hans J. Wegner graduated in architecture and got two lucky breaks, first working with Arne Jacobsen, and then when The Round Chair he designed with Johannes Hansen in 1949 was released to the world during the 1960 presidential elections in the US.



# Hans\_

# J.Wegner

Denmark  
1914\_2007

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Newly invigorated by his experience at Århus, Wegner started his own studio in 1943. Not one to be contented with traditional approaches, he experimented with steam-bent wood, laminated wood, metal, and so forth, and pushed the boundaries of these materials. The result is an oeuvre of sculptural pieces whose fluid lines and warm timber tone stood as a gentle rebuke to the hard lines and angles of Modernism. Apart from The Round Chair, Wegner designed several iconic pieces that remain popular to this day. They include the China chair (4283) for Fritz Hansen, which was inspired by portraits of Danish merchants sitting in Ming chairs displayed at the Danish Maritime Museum; the Wishbone chair (CH24) for Carl Hansen & Søn, a late variant of the China chair; and the Peacock chair for PP Møbler (PP550), which was his take on the classic Windsor chair.

Wegner's style is often described as 'organic functionalism'. Although sculptural, his chairs were designed to be purposeful pieces that emphasised joinery and ergonomics. Indeed, most would agree that it is difficult to find any Wegner chair that is uncomfortable.

"First and foremost, it's comfortable, and saying that it's comfortable before saying it's beautiful is really high praise, because the truth is that it's incredibly elegant," said Paola Antonelli, the curator of architecture and design at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, of Wegner's designs.

It is the year 1960. Millions of Americans are glued to their television screens on the night of the nation's first televised presidential debate. On the left of the screen sits the confident and self-assured Senator John F. Kennedy. On the right sits the pale and underweight Vice-President Richard Nixon, still recovering from a recent hospital stay. As the two presidential hopefuls battle it out on screen, a European celebrity sits quietly on stage, witness to a key moment in history: the night political campaigning is forever altered by the television set. While our celebrity is no eloquent debater, he stoically lends his support to the political heavyweights of that evening. Meet The Round Chair — a design so iconic it was simply known as 'The Chair'.



A symbol of Danish craftsmanship, The Round Chair by Hans J. Wegner was first produced in 1950 by Johannes Hansen Cabinetmakers, who exhibited in the US shortly after. Design magazines of the day soon picked up on it and featured it heavily in publications, with *Interiors* magazine even referring to it as "the most beautiful chair in the world". Among the 500 plus chairs that Wegner designed during his long career, The Round Chair is undoubtedly his most prominent and successful creation. Its success thrust Wegner into the international limelight and he became inundated with calls from US furniture companies wanting to reproduce his design. He declined all of their offers, stating in a television interview that "it has to be crafted by Danes". Today, The Round Chair remains in Danish hands with PP Møbler producing both the original version with the cane seat, the PP501, as well as an upholstered version, the PP503.

Wegner's staunch belief in Danish craftsmanship can be explained by the fact that, above all else, he thought of himself first as a cabinet-maker, then a designer. Born in 1914 in Tønder, Denmark, Wegner rose from humble beginnings. The son of a shoemaker, he finished his apprenticeship as a cabinet-maker with H.F. Stahlberg at the age of 17 before moving to Copenhagen to attend the School of Arts and Crafts. At 24, he graduated from school and began working as an architect. Two years later, in 1940, he got his big break working alongside Arne Jacobsen and Erik Møller on the furniture design for the new Århus City Hall. That same year, Wegner began collaborating with master cabinet-maker Johannes Hansen, who would eventually bring his designs to the US.

Top Designed in 1951 The Teddy Bear Chair was the first Hans J. Wegner design produced at PP Møbler. Bottom Designer Hans J. Wegner in his studio.



The Danish master did not just design furniture. Occupying a less prominent, though no doubt important, position in Wegner's oeuvre are his lamps. Distributed by Carl Hansen & Søn, the handmade, height-adjustable Pandul pendant is probably the most well known. Designed in 1962, the lamp's key feature is a handle that is integrated into the lampshade. This simple but ingenious concept allows the lamp to be raised and lowered without touching the aluminium shade.

Wegner's prolific career makes him one of the most productive Danish designers in modern history. Before his retirement in the 1990s, he garnered a string of accolades, including the Lunning prize, the grand prix of the Milan Triennale, Sweden's Prince Eugen medal, and the Danish Eckersberg medal. Wegner passed away at the age of 92, but even after his death, manufacturers continue to be inspired by the treasure-trove of sketches and models he left behind. A previously unknown easy chair, created by Wegner in 1960, was put into production by Carl Hansen and Søn and released only two years ago. While 'the world's best cabinet-maker' may no longer be with us, his spirit lives on. As Wegner so aptly put it in an interview, "The good chair is a task one is never completely done with."

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Clockwise from top left The sculptural CH445 or 'Wingchair' designed in 1960 and made by Carl Hansen & Søn; The Wishbone chair is one of Wegner's most iconic designs and the first of his chairs to be produced by Carl Hansen & Søn in 1949; The Valet chair by PP Møbler with its backrest shaped as a coat hanger and a seat for both sitting and storing; the Shell chair made by Carl Hansen & Søn since 1963; designed in 1950 the Flag Halyard chair by PP Møbler is made of solid stainless steel, 240 metres of specially developed flag line and long-haired sheepskin; the simple lines of the CH33 reference the classic designs of the 1950s and 60s; and The Round Chair made by PP Møbler remains an icon for Danish woodworking and the Danish modern design philosophy.